

## The Knowledge Bank at The Ohio State University

### Ohio State Engineer

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# The Engineer's Bookshelf

By Wilson R. Dumble

*THE following article was not written for publication in any magazine, let alone in the Ohio State Engineer; but since I have placed my ideas about a reading list for engineering students in black and white I thought it might be of interest to the readers of this column to see if my philosophy coincides with their ideas on the same subject. No doubt they too have failed from time to time to analyze why they read certain books and shun others.*

*A book list of suggested readings for the summer follows this article, and it is trusted that students will find there something that will interest them during the free summer months.*

## The Philosophy of a Book List for Technical Students

FROM time to time students come to me asking for guidance in selections of a book list and wishing me to help them select a list not only of novels but also of plays where they can turn in their leisure moments for enjoyment and recreation. Some times I ask them if they have read the Forsyte novels of Galsworthy, or the plain stories of Willa Cather, or perhaps the one act sea plays of Eugene O'Neill. And frequently after I have made that inquiry I turn to myself with the questions: Why did you ask about those particular novels and plays? Why didn't you ask if they had read Flaubert, or Euripides? Don't you realize the importance of Emma Bovary as a literary milestone? Do you forget that "Salammbô" is the greatest of all historical novels, and that the immortal Greek tragedies seem almost modern in their point of view?

Recently I have tried to answer those questions by figuring out my unconscious philosophy of a book list for technical students, a book list that only gives guidance and makes suggestions. There exists, back of my suggestions, a kind of judgment which is the result of previous attempts at book suggestions.

Briefly, I feel that the philosophy of a book list for students of technology rests on the fact that a book should furnish the reader timely relief from the daily routine of life and give him breadth for the appreciation of everyday modern experiences through personal identification. If that element of personal identification can be gained through a reading of Flaubert or Euripides or others of various centuries I certainly am in favor of it. With rare exceptions, however, it cannot be gained, because the modern background is necessary.

I cannot agree that a reader is always trying to round out the experiences of life that have not crossed his personal path by means of getting them in second hand fashion from the printed page. A reader, for the most part, prefers to identify himself with the hero of a novel, realizing that he is reading in part his own life history. No doubt that is why Somerset Maugham's "Of Human Bondage" is a best seller to college students, and why Faulkner is preferred to Fielding, Hemingway to Homer, and "Men in White" Kingsley to "Hypatia" Kingsley.

## Personal Identification

The personal identification element in the reader's mind must come from the modern, or from a few outstanding novels of the Victorian, and not from literature ranging between Chaucer and Richardson. It takes an expert instructor working at capacity to interest an agricultural or an engineering student in material of Sir Thomas Moore, or Spencer, or Goldsmith, or Burns or Ruskin. Even at that, if class interest is gained by the instructor, nine times out of ten, no doubt, it is gained by analogies to modern life and modern literature. Surely the twentieth century devotion of a club foot lad to feminine beauty in "Human Bondage" is far more impressive than the fifteenth century devotion of a curious hunchback for a dancer in "Notre Dame de Paris." By this I do not mean that Victor Hugo is out-moded or out-dated although to some he might be; but I do mean that to the average student the Maugham novel fits better into his appreciation of every day modern experience than does the Hugo classic.

This idea of personal identification applies not only to novels and to the drama, but also to biographical writings. Naturally the short story was just as good—with rare exceptions—and sometimes better before 1900 than it has been since. But students read short stories, whereas they are apt to neglect the longer pieces of fiction, the drama, and the biography. The chief concern is to get students interested in reading, and this, I believe, can be done by stimulating interest in the modern and not in the older pieces of writing.

## State Fair

A survey of a large number of rural students at any state university might reveal that of all the modern novels they read they prefer Phil Stong's "State Fair." This fact is easily understood, because that novel furnishes the background that fits into their own personal experiences. They so well recall the evening, some few years back,

when they too, were loaded into the old family Ford and drove half the night to the capital city where their father's prize boar was to be exhibited.

In like fashion hundreds of thousands of Americans enjoyed Sinclair Lewis' "Main Street" because they actually had been Carol Kennicots or Dr. Kennicots in the thousands of Gopher Prairies throughout our country side. It is most certain that an attempt at a revival of Ed Howe's "Story of a Country Town" would never have been successful, for, although the background of the Howe and Lewis novels is practically the same, one was a town of the Eighties while the other was a town of the Nineteen-Twenties. The reader would much prefer "Main Street" because of the modern personal identification, the actual representation of himself on the printed page.

For that very reason I am a strong advocate of a reading list comprised mostly of books published since 1900. They will enable the student to gain a breadth for the appreciation of everyday *modern* experiences by means of that personal identification element. If an instructor is able to get a technical student interested in reading one book of that kind he will be able also to interest him in

similar editions. If, for example, the rural student is interested in "State Fair," it should follow most naturally that he will be equally interested in Mrs. Wharton's "Ethan Frome," Rolvaag's "Giants in the Earth," Hergesheimer's "Three Black Pennys," Willa Cather's "My Antonia," Sherwood Anderson's "Winesburg, Ohio," and many others.

Surely the success of James Hilton's sentimental little story of Mr. Chipps is not due entirely to Alexander Woolcott's ballyhoo; its success is due chiefly to the very fact that we, too, back in our prep school days were wisely and justly, sincerely and honestly influenced by a Mr. Chipps; and, crusty as he seemed, we realize now his gentleness and kindness and greatness. We identify ourselves with the students under Mr. Chipps' tutelage, and in reading the book gain breadth for the appreciation of things and people about us.

For technical students the modern list of readings is the logical list. The readers are learning, probably for the first time, that other people are sharing their happiness and their sadness, and they will be eager to read more to prove their point.

## Suggested Summer Reading

### British and American Novels

Anderson, Sherwood: Winesburg, Ohio  
 Bennett, E. Arnold: The Old Wives Tale  
 Blackmore, R. D.: Lorna Doone  
 Buck, Pearl: The Good Earth  
 Butler, Samuel: Erewhon; The Way of All Flesh  
 Cather, Willa S.: My Antonia; O Pioneers; A Lost Lady; Death Comes for the Archbishop; Song of the Lark; Shadows on the Rock; The Professor's House  
 Conrad, Joseph: Youth; Lord Jim  
 Crane, Stephen: The Red Badge of Courage  
 Dreiser, Theodore: An American Tragedy  
 Edmunds, Walter D.: Erie Water  
 Fisher, Dorothy C.: The Bent Twig  
 Galsworthy, John: The Forsyte Saga; The Modern Comedy  
 Hemingway, Ernest: A Farewell to Arms  
 Hergesheimer, Joseph: The Three Black Pennys  
 Hilton, James: Goodbye, Mr. Chipps  
 Howells, William D.: A Modern Instance; The Rise of Silas Lapham  
 Lewis, Sinclair: Arrowsmith; Babbitt; Main Street  
 Locke, William J.: The Beloved Vagabond  
 Maugham, W. S.: Of Human Bondage; Moon and Sixpence  
 Priestley, J. B.: The Good Companions  
 Reade, Charles: The Cloister and the Hearth  
 Remarque, Eric: All Quiet on the Western Front  
 Rolvaag, O. E.: Giants in the Earth  
 Stevenson, R. L.: Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde  
 Stong, Phil: State Fair

Walpole, Hugh: The Cathedral; Fortitude  
 Wells, H. G.: The War in the Air; The Time Machine  
 Wharton, Edith: Ethan Frome; Age of Innocence  
 Wilder, Thornton: The Bridge of San Luis Rey

### Modern Drama

Atkins, Zoe: The Old Maid, Déclassé  
 Anderson, Maxwell: Valley Forge, Saturday's Children, Mary of Scotland  
 Anderson and Stallings: What Price Glory?  
 Barrie, Sir James: What Every Woman Knows, Dear Brutus, The Admirable Crichton, etc.  
 Bessier, George: The Barretts of Wimpole Street  
 Capek, Karel: R. U. R.  
 Chekhov, Anton: The Cherry Orchard, Three Sisters, Uncle Vanya, The Sea Gull  
 Connelly, Marc: Green Pastures, The Wisdom Tooth  
 Coward Noel: Cavalcade, Design for Living, Private Lives  
 Crothers, Rachel: Mary The Third, As Husbands Go, He and She  
 Franken, Rose: Another Language  
 Flavin, Martin: Criminal Code  
 Gale, Zona: Miss Lulu Betts  
 Galsworthy, John: Strife, Justice, Escape, The Silver Box, Loyalties  
 Hellman, Lillian: The Children's Hour  
 Howard, Sidney: The Silver Cord, Yellow Jack  
 Ibsen, Henrik: An Enemy of the People, Ghosts, Hedda Gabler, The Wild Duck, Rosmersholm, Doll's House.  
 Maugham, W. Somerset: The Constant Wife, Our Beters, The Circle, Rain

- Milne, A. A.: The Ivory Door, The Truth About  
Blayds, Mr. Pim Passes By
- Moody, Wm. Vaughn: The Great Divide
- O'Neill, Eugene: Mourning Becomes Electra, Anna  
Christie, Dynamo, The Hairy Ape, A Strange Inter-  
lude, Beyond the Horizon, Ah Wilderness, etc.
- Pirandello, Luigi: Right You Are If You Think You Are
- Rice, Elmer: The Adding Machine, Street Scene
- Sheriff, R. C.: Journey's End
- Wilde, Oscar: Lady Windemere's Fan, a Woman of No  
Importance, The Importance of Being Earnest
- Yeats, William: The Land of Heart's Desire
- Biography
- Addams, Jane: Twenty Years at Hull House
- Antin, Mary: The Promised Land
- Appleyard, Rollo: A Tribute to Michael Faraday
- Bradford, Gamaliel: Damaged Souls, Saints and Sinners
- Brown, Harriet C.: Grandmother Brown's Hundred  
Years (Blue Ribbon)
- Brown, Rollo C.: Lonely Americans
- Bryan, Edison: The Man and His Work (Star)
- Cellini, Benvenuto: Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini  
(Mod. Lib. Star, Everyman)
- Hudson, W. H.: Far Away and Long Ago
- Jaffee, Crucibles
- James, Marquis: The Raven, (The Life of Sam Hous-  
ton) (Blue Ribbon)
- Ludwig, Emil: Genius and Character (From Leonardo  
and Lenin) (Blue Ribbon), Napoleon
- Marshall, T. N.: James Watt
- Maurois, Andre: Disraeli
- Merejkowski: The Romance of Leonardo de Vinci  
(Modern Library)
- Pupin, Michael: From Immigrant to Inventor
- Sandburg, Carl: Abraham Lincoln (Blue Ribbon), Mary  
Lincoln
- Symonds, John, A.: Life of Michelangelo (Modern Li-  
brary)
- Washington, Booker T.: Up from Slavery
- Woodward, W. E.: Meet General Grant (Dollar Edi-  
tion)
- Prout: Life of George Westinghouse
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